Political Hegemony and eDomination in the Age of ICTs

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***Abstract*:** *In the era of rapid ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) growth, public attention has shifted from traditional mass media to Internet-based platforms and social media. This research investigates the concept of political hegemony in the context of the digital age, focusing on the interplay between eDomination and eParticipation. It examines the ways in which authoritarian governments exploit new technological tools to maintain power and control over their citizens. Specifically, the study analyzes the impact of information warfare and electronic surveillance on the suppression and control of dissent. By exploring these dynamics, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the relationship between power, technology, and the public sphere.*

Keywords: *Political Hegemony, eDomination, ICTs, Social Media, Information Warfare, Electronic Surveillance, Authoritarian Regimes*

1. Introduction

This study aims to explore the dynamics of media domination in the context of the shift from traditional mass media to Internet-based media, particularly social network sites. By examining the concept of domination and its role in mass media, the study will focus on the implementation of this concept in Internet-based media, commonly referred to as eDomination or digital domination. Additionally, the study will investigate how authoritarian governments utilize digital domination to control public discourse. The underlying assumption of this research is that changes in media technology, such as the transition from mass media like radio and television to Internet-based social media, do not eliminate the concept of political domination in the media. While some theorists highlight the potential of these new media and Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) to foster a more democratic environment and enhance public participation through digital democracy or eDemocracy, other theorists argue that the use of these media platforms intensifies political domination. Building upon the latter viewpoint, this study posits that the possibilities presented by the digital realm pose a more potent form of mass media domination, particularly when combined with electronic surveillance technologies and information warfare. By examining the case study of the Iranian government's actions during the Presidential protests in 2009, the study will provide empirical evidence to support the hypothesis that political eDomination is implemented in practice. This research seeks to contribute to the understanding of how media domination manifests in the digital age, shedding light on the potential risks and implications associated with the use of Internet-based media platforms by authoritarian regimes.

2. Literature review

To develop a comprehensive understanding of domination, it is crucial to delve into the foundational theories that underpin this concept. The Cambridge Dictionary defines domination as having control over people or a situation. Domination entails the exercise of power and control over individuals, groups, or societies, whereby an entity or group influences, manipulates, or governs others to establish and sustain authority and

dominance. Control can take various forms, including political, economic, social, and cultural domination, and can be exerted through explicit coercion or more subtle mechanisms of influence. It is an unchained, oppressive inconsistency of power that lets agents or states control other agents or the conditions of their actions. In fact, theories of domination seek to explore and find a connection between what is referred to as the unequal relationship between powers. The connection between the strong and the weak, domination, lordship, the place of freedom, or equality are the concepts considered in these theories.

Max Weber provides a definition of domination as the likelihood of specific commands, or all commands, being obeyed by a particular group of individuals (Weber, 1968, p. 212). He emphasizes that genuine domination requires a minimum level of voluntary compliance, driven either by ulterior motives or genuine acceptance (Weber, 1968, p. 212). This definition underscores the central role of power in establishing relationships of domination or hegemony, where one person or group exercises power over others, coercing them to comply with certain actions or beliefs. Domination involves the use of coercion to influence others, processes, and decisions. Power can take various forms, including economic resources, social relationships, human activities, capabilities, and knowledge. Pierre Bourdieu (1986) terms these forms as economic, political, and cultural capital, which enable individuals and groups with control over these capital types to exert varying degrees of influence over decisions (Fuchs, 2003). Consequently, domination arises from the unequal distribution of power, negating the notion of equal power distribution within the concept. Moreover, domination goes beyond this inherent inequality, as it encompasses coercion. The dominant party employs force, violence, sanctions, threats, and even repression to shape the desires of others to fulfill their own interests.

The use of domination, or exerting influence through the superiority of power over the weaker, involves creating fear, coercion, and repression to control individuals or opposing groups. Fuchs (2008, p. 174) describes a coercive or dominative system as hierarchic, oligopolistic, autocratic, disregarding the desires and purposes of individuals within the system. Members exist solely to serve the limited number of people setting the system's purposes. In such a dominant society, all means are utilized to fulfill the leaders' demands. The media, as a source of entertainment and information, plays a vital role in maintaining power and augmenting leaders' dominance. Milliband (1969, p. 198) observes that the media serves as an expression and reinforcement of a system of domination.

According to the Authoritarian theory proposed by media theorists such as Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm (1956), all forms of communication in authoritarian societies serve the leaders' demands for societal control. The press functions as an instrument to consolidate the ruler's power rather than posing any threat. Authorities possess the authority to grant licenses to media outlets and impose censorship, thus controlling the media landscape. In many countries, this control lies in the hands of a monarch who grants royal charters or licenses to media practitioners. Violations of these charters can lead to imprisonment, and charters or licenses can be revoked, enabling various forms of censorship.

In contemporary societies, the concept of domination continues to persist as a means of accumulating power. Within the realm of Internet-based media, dependent on information communication technologies, the concept of domination interacts with the logic of competition. However, competition contradicts cooperation, leading to a modern antagonism between the concepts of digital domination (eDomination) and digital participation (eParticipation). The potentials for new forms of participation and domination within the internetted media environment depend on the Internet. Optimists like Marshall McLuhan argue that cyberspace strengthens political participation and fosters a global village, while pessimists like Neil Postman argue that new media result in a totalitarian Technopolis. In the realm of cyberspace, internetted media introduces new dimensions of digital domination, embodied in two forms of eDomination: the violent manifestation of information warfare and the controlling nature of electronic surveillance.to (please specify).

2.1. Information Warfare

Making use of civilian technologies in networked wars ranges from the employment of mass media's interest in sensations for transporting symbolic messages and producing fear to the usage of letter post for mailing letters and other bombs to victims and the usage of computer networks for coordinating and planning attacks and carrying out online attacks in order to destroy or manipulate the enemy's information infrastructure. Martin Libicki (2000) sees information warfare in a more broad sense. According to him, the concept of information warfare refers to the importance of information, information systems, and information technology in warfare. However, some positive perspectives on information warfare believe that the potential for information warfare is on the good side and could end the war without any bloodshed, casualties, or civilian fatality (e.g., M. Moore

2006). However, the point that should not be overlooked is that manipulating information, reversing it, destroying access to information, and using computer technology will not eliminate the possibility of war being waged by enemies. Information war has three-level; cognitive information war, Communicative Information War, which is related to creating fear, misinformation, and media manipulation, and Co-operative Information War as Netwar. Cognitive Information War influences the mind, frightens enemies, and creates fear and terror to weaken enemies' psyches and gather information from them. Hakim Bey (1995) points out; information war or hyperreal war means the fight "for the acquisition of territory indigenous to the Information Age, i.e., the human mind itself." Communicative Information War runs in order to destroy information, destroy the information streams and flows, decrypt the messages and radars, and encrypt and manipulate the enemy's information content. Part of the reality of information war today consists of media manipulation. US officials and media have been keen on not showing pictures or videos of dead soldiers in recent years because this could create an alternative image of war to one of the sanitized high-tech wars presented by most mainstream media. Media are involved in propaganda warfare themselves and have a hard time avoiding being used as channels for manipulating and influencing public opinion during warfare. Pictures that show the violent side of a war can influence public opinion in such a way that voices that oppose warfare increase. (Fuchs, 2008, p.197). Co-operative Information War, or in other words, warfare, is, in fact, the exercise of power and the exercise of violence by the ruling state to destroy and suppress foreign or opposition individuals or groups. John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt (1996) define netwar as "an emerging conflict (and crime) at a societal level, involving measures short of war, in which the protagonists use— indeed, depend on using—network forms of organization, doctrine, strategy, and communication. These protagonists generally consist of dispersed, often small groups who agree to communicate, coordinate, and act in an internetted manner, often without a precise central leadership or headquarters. Decision-making may be deliberately decentralized and dispersed" (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 1996, p.5).

2.2. Electronic Surveillance

The concept of surveillance in the age of new information communication technologies for Kevin Robins and Frank Webster (1999), is an extension of Bentham's panopticon insomuch they "monitor the activities, tastes, and preferences of those who are networked… Power expresses itself as surveillance and Panopticism, now on the scale of society as a whole" (Robins and Webster 1999, pp. 118 & 122). The panopticon is indeed a structural idea, such as a prison building, a type of building or institution for control, and the domination of prisoners designed by English philosopher and social theorist Jeremy Bentham in the 18th century. The ability in which a person can actually observe all prisoners from the observation room, even if it is not physically possible for him, will pursue this feeling for the prisoners that they are being controlled and watched at all times. He "is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication" (Foucault, 1979, p.208). As a result, prisoners will be constrained to abide by the rules—the same feeling as you are exposed to CCTV cameras nowadays. Surveillance is collecting or gathering personal or confidential information about groups or individuals to monitor discipline, establish dominance, threats, punishment, or intimidation and violence against them. Foucault describes how surveillance has become a fundamental mechanism of modern society that is pervasive in all institutions, so less direct violence is needed. People discipline themselves because they are aware of surveillance and afraid of potential sanctions or are disciplined by punishment. (Fuchs, 2008, p.204). Lyon (2003, p. 5; cf. also 2001, pp. 2 & 16) defines surveillance as "routine ways in which focused attention is paid to personal details by organizations that want to influence, manage, or control certain persons or population groups." According to Christopher Parsons (2011), "When we send messages to one another online, when we browse the web pages and send e-mail, our communications are typically unencrypted, that is, they are in a form that can be easily read." According to Christian Fuschs (2010), other forms of surveillance include: 1) Scanning the fingerprints of visitors entering the United States. 2) Using speed cameras for identifying speeders involves state power. 3) Electronic monitoring bracelets for prisoners in an open prison system. 4) Scanning of Internet and phone data by secret services. 5) Usage of full-body scanners at airports. 6) Biometric passports

containing digital fingerprints. 7) CCTV cameras in public places to prevent crime and terrorism. 8) Assessment of customer shopping behavior with the help of loyalty cards. 9) Data collection in marketing research. 10) Assessment of personal images and videos of applicants on Facebook by employers prior to a job interview. 11) Passenger Name Record (PNR) data transfer in the aviation industry. 12) Corporations are spying on employees or union members.

3. Case study: The Presidential Protests in Iran[1]

During the 40 years of the Islamic Republic of Iran's existence, social protests have occurred repeatedly. However, they were usually local and caused local problems. However, in the last decade, the waves of widespread dissatisfaction on a national scale have been increasing. For the first time, anti-government protests across Iran took place in 2009. At the time, public outrage stemmed from problems counting votes in the presidential election, where Ahmadinejad unexpectedly won. These were political demonstrations called the Green Revolution. The rallies were held in several major cities in Iran. The demands then focused on the only goal of canceling the election results, which Ahmadinejad won. In addition, all requests remain in the Islamic Republic's system. One of the salient features of these protests was that Iranians, with the help of social media, not only coordinated their actions with each other but also passed on information to the world about what was happening in Iran. Iran's second strong wave of protests was in late 2017 - early 2018. At that time, the reason was the increase in food prices. Even though the economic factor was the starting point and the driving force behind the protests, everything quickly became politically opposed to the leadership of the country and the Islamic State. The slogans "Death to the dictator," "Death to Rouhani," and "Death to Khamenei" was chanted in the streets. On November 15, 2019, the third wave of protests in Iran rose after Hassan Rouhani's government doubled gasoline prices. Protests against the decision spread almost all over the country immediately to Tehran and about 100 other cities. More than 100,000 people attended.

4. The Governments' utilization of eDomination

The Iranian government employed various tactics to suppress and quell the protests, utilizing multiple channels of media control. Within the realm of mass media, which includes radio, newspapers, and television, no coverage or dissemination of news, images, or information regarding the protests occurred. These media outlets, being entirely one-dimensional and directly controlled by the government, operated in complete silence. As the waves of protests persisted, the Iranian mass media began disseminating fabricated and manipulated news and images portraying the riots as the actions of a small group of individuals within the city. By distorting the facts, this news narrative depicted the people as responsible for the street chaos, including acts such as setting banks on fire and even murdering police officers. In the realm of Internet-based media, the government took measures to filter and restrict access to opposition news sources and online information related to the protests. As the scale of the protests escalated, the government initially limited people's access to the internet and eventually made the decision to completely shut down internet services nationwide. Additionally, in some instances, the government temporarily suspended telecommunication networks and mobile phone communication. Regarding government surveillance efforts against the people, it is worth noting that government forces utilized CCTV cameras in metro stations and streets to record individuals participating in the protests. These recorded videos were subsequently used to intimidate and threaten the individuals. Such identification methods resulted in numerous anonymous phone calls targeting people, which subsequently led to their arrest. The intelligence systems in Iran also implemented filtering mechanisms to detect specific words in text messages, telephone conversations, and social media posts. If individuals sent text messages containing government-filtered words, those messages would not reach their intended recipients. Those who were arrested by the police and security forces faced a comprehensive collection of documents, including personal text messages, private phone conversations, and

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[1] The news archive BBC Farsi (https://www.bbc.com/persian) and the "Balatarin" news agency (https://www.balatarin.com/) have been used for this section.

published posts on their social media accounts. Over the past decade, the government forces have caused the deaths of over a thousand people, injured tens of thousands, and detained hundreds of thousands more.

5. Conclusion

During the mentioned protests in Iran, the role of the Internet, Internet-based media, and information communication technologies in informing the public and creating a participatory movement points to the positive side, which is also based on optimistic views, is quite clear. However, given the primary assumption of this research, which is based on the role of Internet-based media and information communication technologies in creating new dimensions of domination, which is a way of establishing asymmetric power relations by force and violence, this research has addressed the role of domination in these protests. With its two distinct forms, digital domination or eDomination in the ICTs age opposes democracy. eDomination takes on its most violent state in information warfare and its most controlling form in electronic surveillance. Due to the case study, we saw the use of all forms and levels of information warfare, manipulation of reality, interrupting the access to information resources and gathering information from the public, and the use of new potentials of digital surveillance by an authoritarian government.

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